

## **Real Stories of Young Entrepreneurs in Wisconsin**

**Name:** Azia Peterslie

**School & Grade:** 12<sup>th</sup> grade at Holmen High School

**Business Name:** Candy-Coated Catering

**What inspired you to start your business? Tell us about your inspiration, your idea and how it became a reality.**

Baking has always been a prominent interest of mine growing up. Along with baking, I have largely been involved in crafting my entire life. That is why I find Candy-Coated Catering to be such a fun and enjoyable business venture, as it combines my two favorite hobbies and passions. Baking for family and friends was a part of my childhood, and in 2010 by the time I was fifteen and had established Candy-Coated Catering, the same family and friends I had been baking for years earlier were paying me for my products. I was not inspired to turn Candy-Coated Catering into a public business venture with so many products and services offered until April 2011. The inspiration of event catering came from several crafting magazines and Martha Stewart books. I loved everything about the rising trend of candy and gourmet popcorn buffets, which nobody in the area was doing. Once my sister and I had established the candy and popcorn aspect of Candy-Coated Catering we became very interested in cake decorating, especially cupcakes as they have become very popular in the wedding industry over the past few years. This idea led us to start taking Wilton cake decorating courses, which we enjoyed so much that lately a main focus has been catering cakes, cupcakes, and cake pops for events. I only see Candy-Coated Catering growing in the future based on the pique of success we have had so far. This business has been such an accomplishment thus far that I can readily see expansion in the future.

**Describe your product / service, purpose / goals, features / benefits, unique selling point.**

Candy-Coated Catering is a public catering company based out of La Crosse, Wisconsin, specializing in candy, popcorn, and chocolate buffets, customized cakes and cupcakes, and made-to-order handmade delectables. Our services for buffets include the design, display, and set up of product, as well as the product itself. We cater events small to large in all aspects of our service, as well as make products to order for pickup.

The purpose of Candy-Coated Catering is to provide the La Crosse area with premiere delectable products that are customized on an event-basis. Our unique selling point is that we are the only catering company in the area that offers buffets of our delectables and has a large range of products ranging from customized cakes decorated in handmade gum paste flowers, to bride and groom designed chocolate dipped strawberries, to hand-designed candy buffets that become a beautiful and colorful work of art. Our goals for Candy-Coated Catering are endless. As we see enormous potential as does our current clients, we would like to expand. We plan to visit wholesale candy suppliers at trade shows yet this year, as well as have an exhibit booth of our own at Wedding World in La Crosse next year. Our foremost priority is to purchase a commercial conventional oven large enough for a full sheet cake by the end of the year as well as expand our client base with more advertisements, word of mouth, and promotions in the area. We have kept fairly busy since the business went public in April of 2011, and are expecting more growth in the wedding

event business. We have already secured Candy-Coated Catering's position as the sole caterer in all of our offered services including wedding cakes at a prominent reception hall in the area, The Grand Hotel Ballroom. This has been one of our greatest accomplishments as a fairly new business as it will guarantee business for us with every event that will be held in this specific reception hall. This merger is not expected to begin until I finish college, as we will be extremely busy and expected to have several events each month. Like with our commercial kitchen, this benefit is based on a small percentage of our sales. As my sister and I have had wonderful success with Candy-Coated Catering thus far and have received tremendous reviews from our clients, we are positive that our business will have a promising and fresh future in the area, as well as potential for expansion.

**Tell us about yourself and how you make your business succeed.**

Growing up in an entrepreneurial family, I have always been interested and talented in the aspects of business. I have taken several marketing and business classes at the high school, as well as an entrepreneurship class. These courses not only secured my interest, but the knowledge I gained has assisted me in my own business venture. I have worked very hard since 2010 in order to bring Candy-Coated Catering to the point it is at right now. I am sure that with the work ethic, drive, and leadership that I fuel my business with, it will succeed. The skills that I have acquired by working in my family business as a child have led me to be the person I am today. I have determination and the passion to make Candy-Coated Catering flourish, demonstrated by the several awards and recognitions I have received throughout my high school career. For instance, my senior class voted me "Most Likely to be an Entrepreneur" and I have received several awards, medals, and recognitions through competitive DECA. I have demonstrated commitment in the business with all of the obstacles that I have faced and overcome thus far. I was determined to expand Candy-Coated Catering, so my sister and I decided to take the business public in April 2011. In order to make the business public we also had to be licensed and have a commercial kitchen to make our products out of. This led us to make Candy-Coated Catering a division of my parents ice cream and candy business, which fit hand in hand. The commercial kitchen we rent is based off of fifteen percent of our sales and we have found the kitchen to be very convenient to work out of as it is in close proximity to most of the area's reception halls. This was a big commitment that we were willing to make as we are expecting public catering to give us a wide range of new business that we were not able to reach before establishing a license and commercial kitchen. Another obstacle that we faced was the cake decorating courses that we have been taking weekly along with our schoolwork. These have been challenging, time consuming, but overall a wonderful experience that I have been honored to be a part of. The most rewarding part thus far of Candy-Coated Catering has been the business experience I have gained and the time I have been able to spend with my younger sister working on events. We have demonstrated vision and calculated risk-taking by expanding and always having a business plan that we follow for Candy-Coated Catering. By renting our kitchen as well as having our business as a division of our family business, we are able to avoid several problems and can share bank accounts, financial statements, and bills with the family business rather than having all of our own. I would consider Candy-Coated Catering an achievement in itself. It has proved to be very successful thus far and I only expect growth and expansion. Our greatest achievements include: partnering with The Grand Hotel Ballroom to ensure monthly business in the future, acquiring a commercial kitchen on a rent-basis, expanding customer base within the first 9 months of being public in 2011, completing several Wilton decorating, fondant, and gum paste courses, and finishing our Candy-Coated Catering website.

**What are your future goals and vision for your business? How do you propose to develop your business?**

I see a promising future and extreme potential for Candy-Coated Catering. We have had wonderful reviews by clients so far and see expansion in the near future. Upon graduating with a degree in

entrepreneurship and business management from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I plan to develop Candy-Coated Catering into one of the area's leading caterers. My sister and I have even discussed possibly making Candy-Coated its own division of our own company and having another division where we cater gourmet food for events as well. This would increase our product range even more. We plan to further increase Candy-Coated Catering's product range by also including ice cream, gourmet drink, and personalized handmade candies. We would like to add another employee if we start event planning in the future, as well as more employees to help with catering, design and transportation for our larger events. We will achieve these future goals and plans by keeping a large client base, advertising in the area, and quickly expanding our business after my graduation from Madison. We are certain that with our future business plan, ideas, and resources, that we will be able to establish Candy-Coated Catering as a leading caterer, event planning service, and dessert manufacturer for the greater La Crosse area.